

SAFETY ALERT

February 2007

FEBRUARY THEME

BACKING

Year after year, improper backing is the error that causes the most crashes with State Fleet vehicles. From January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2006, 26% of State Fleet vehicle crashes were caused by improper backing – 72 backing crashes with a total cost of damage reaching \$35,447.62.

Most backing accidents do not cause injury because of the low speeds involved, but they are costly and preventable. The cost to repair damage from backing crashes is seldom recoverable. Collision repair cost is an operating expense. Operating expense is a factor in determining vehicle rental rates. Unrecovered collision repair cost puts upward pressure on rental rates. Crashes caused by improper backing are the most preventable of all accidents. Here are some tips on ways to avoid being on the “Bad Backer” list.

- Plan ahead. Avoid backing when you can. Always park where you can drive away without having to back up if such a space is available.
- If you parked where you must back up, take note of anything you might back into, and check clearance behind and around your vehicle as you approach and prepare to enter. Once you have ascertained the way is clear, back up before someone or something gets in your way
- Use a guide to assist you in backing if there is someone available. This is especially important with larger vehicles. Make sure your guide understands that they must be able to see you in the mirror for you to be able to see them.
- If you have been waiting in the vehicle, don't assume that if the area behind and around you appeared clear when you stopped, that it still is. Get out and look before backing.
- Be sure! Stop and get out and look if you are not sure you have sufficient clearance.
- Back slowly!

Backing crashes are the most preventable of all crashes. A little extra planning, common sense and care will substantially reduce the number of backing crashes in our State Fleet.

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CRUISE CONTROL

Cruise control has been available on cars for many years and is a very popular option. Nearly all State Fleet vehicles intended for highway use are equipped with cruise control.

Cruise control keeps the vehicle moving at a rate of speed set by the driver. For most drivers, using cruise control will provide a little better fuel economy and make the trip less tiring.

Cruise control can be a helpful and convenient feature, but it can also be a deadly menace to the unwary or uninformed, particularly during winter driving conditions.

Most drivers know they should never engage cruise control during inclement weather or on slippery roads. But one of the most dangerous winter driving conditions for cruise control users can occur during sunny days when there is enough wind to blow snow across some areas of the road. The sun warms the pavement enough to cause melting. The snow blown areas frequently become slick with packed snow or black ice, while the rest of the pavement remains dry. Hitting one of these slick areas with the cruise control engaged can cause almost instant loss of control. The danger is multiplied at night because you cannot see potential danger areas until you are almost on them and too close to react.

Every winter it seems that there are drivers that have crashes because they activate cruise control when conditions are not suitable for it. **Never engage cruise control when there is any chance of encountering ice, snow, slush or frost on the roadway.** Cruise control can make your trip more relaxing and enjoyable, but only when used under the right conditions.